

From doubt to faith.

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[0 : 00] So we're in this passage in John chapter 20. The words should continue to be on the screen. I do keep your thumb in the page in the Bible as well.

Because I'll be referring to it as I go through. And it's a great encouragement to me to know that you've got that page open. And here in this passage we get this encounter with this guy Thomas. With the resurrected Lord Jesus. Now I'm going to start with a little bit of a personal story. I don't know if you had a nickname when you were growing up at school.

Being called Robin. I had quite a few. Sometimes it was just catchphrases that people said. But the one that I got the most was Robin Redbreast.

Or catchphrases. Hey Robin, where's Batman? They managed to turn Rambo into Rambino. And I still get from Will Rubinio.

[0 : 56] So I don't know if you didn't have one of those. Or maybe you did. A lot of nicknames, they sort of die, don't they, when we leave school.

I'm quite relieved that as an adult I don't get Robin Redbreast anymore. As I'm sure you can imagine. But here in this passage we get this character. And the character trait we see in this guy Thomas of doubt.

His nickname has stuck with him for over 2,000 years. Imagine that. Doubting Thomas. And not only that. But it's still used as a phrase about someone who doubts.

Or is a bit of a cynic. Maybe a bit pessimistic. You see. Or you're a bit of a doubting Thomas, aren't you? Don't be such a doubting Thomas. Thomas, anyone who expresses any kind of that level of cynicism.

Poor old Thomas, 2,000 years later, still gets lumped with them. So I think it's a little bit unfair on him, isn't it? It's a little bit unfair because really, I think he should have a different name.

[2 : 00] I think he should be called Honest Thomas. Honest Thomas. Because he articulates something that we've all at one point or another thought. Especially about Christianity.

Because the reason we've thought. The reason we've all doubted. Because the central claim. The central claim of Christian faith is that a dead man. Who, by the way, is definitely dead.

There's no question about that. He was definitely dead just a few pages before in the Gospel of John that we're looking at. I'll just read a verse from chapter 19. This is when he's on the cross.

It says, But when they came to Jesus and found that he was already dead, they did not break his legs. Instead, one of the soldiers pierced Jesus' side with a spear, bringing a sudden flow of blood and water.

And in our modern day understanding of the human body, we know that the separation of blood and water into the red blood cells and the plasma only happens in the stillness of a dead body.

[3 : 02] So John writes water, which would be to us without scientific understanding. We know that that would, what plasma would look like. From the description John gives, we know that Jesus was dead.

The central claim of Christian faith, that a dead man walked out of the grave. Is it really surprising that Thomas doubts? He's just being honest about what's on his mind.

So that's what we're going to look at today, what we're going to be thinking about. The three things that we're going to be thinking is that Jesus meets us where we're at. Jesus' resurrection proves who he is.

And Jesus' promises where the happiness. Jesus meets us where we're at. Jesus' resurrection proves who he is. Jesus' promises happiness, eternal happiness. So the first thing is Jesus meets us where we're at.

The first thing I want us to think through is that's how he meets Thomas. I just want to, but just a reminder of what I just said a minute ago. The central claim of Christianity, that a dead man on the third day after he died, when rigor mortis would have set in, Friday day one, Saturday day two, Monday day three, on Easter Sunday, a dead man stood up and walked out of his own grave. [4 : 18] That he was resurrected and raised to new life from death. This man being Jesus Christ. It is this moment that defines the Christian faith, the resurrection. And so when we read about Thomas' initial response to his friends, we understand why he says that.

Because we've probably thought that too. Early in chapter 20, what we know is in the resurrection account, early on in chapter 20, we've had Mary meet Jesus. And then we've had some of Thomas' friends also meet Jesus. But Thomas wasn't there. Look with me from verse 24. It should be on the screen now.

Thomas, also known as Didymus, one of the twelve, was not with the disciples when Jesus came. Verse 25. So the other disciples told him.

Because he wasn't there, they tell him, we have seen the Lord. And look with me at Thomas' response. But he said to them, Thomas wants hard evidence.

[5 : 33] He has a list of conditions that have to be met for him to believe in it. And we're all a bit like that. We're all a bit like that. Are there things, are there conditions that you would need God to do for you to believe in him?

To trust in him? Thomas' conditions, they are a bit strange, aren't they? They are slightly gory. He wants to touch his wounds. I'm not sure that would be on my list of what I'd want to do. He wants to put his finger inside the nail hole. It's slightly strange. But what he's really saying is, what he's really saying to his friends is, I want to know if this man, the one they claim is reserved, is the same man I knew who died.

That is what he's saying. I want to know if this man, the one they claim is risen, is the same man I knew who died. Now before I myself became a follower of Jesus, there was a time when I was in the same place as Thomas.

And often, maybe you've done this yourself, I'd express my doubts, questions to other Christians. And if you've ever done that, if you've ever voiced your doubts, or spoken to people about why you're doubting, you can get a whole mixture of responses.

[7 : 00] I had that sometimes when I questioned people, they were approachable and listened, which is great. That's what you want. But other times, it could be met with a little bit of hostility.

And I don't know whether, I don't know, maybe they felt like I was attacking or trying to undermine their faith just by asking questions. Maybe I was. But I remember the distinct feeling like when you met with that hostility, when you're just asking a question, because you're doubting yourself, the hostility can come across a little bit like, to me, like I was being told to be quiet.

That I was, came across a little bit like, that was a bit simple. That I didn't know what I was talking about. And it felt patronizing. Let me tell you, those responses, they didn't help me when I had doubts.

It's really important. It's really important because the way a Christian or a follower of Jesus talks about their faith, it does actually say something about the religion they claim to be a part of. If you meet a Christian who is angry or hostile, condescending, or impatient, it stands to reason that you probably think, maybe that's what Christianity is about.

[8 : 22] Even if Jesus is real, which I'm not quite sure about, maybe he's like that as well. Maybe he's going to be offhand and sort of frustrated that I just don't see, I'm just not there yet.

Can I just reassure you, whatever experience you've had with church or with Christians, that Jesus is not angry if you doubt or have questioned yourself.

You know how I know that, that he's not like that? Because when he meets Thomas a week later, look at how he speaks to you. Peace be with you.

Verse 27, then he said to Thomas, put your finger here. See my hand. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe.

He's not angry. Thomas had lived alongside Jesus as one of his closest friends for three years and heard him repeatedly say he was going to rise. You might expect Jesus to demand belief from Thomas, but he doesn't flip out, he doesn't tut or sigh, he doesn't say, you idiot Thomas, don't you remember what I said?

[9 : 32] Weren't you listening? That's not what he does. He doesn't humiliate him in front of everyone or try and win an argument or put him down or make him feel small. There is something very special and beautiful actually about the way he draws faith, belief out of it simply by meeting Thomas where he's at.

You see what he's saying? He's saying, yes, it's me. It really is me. I'm here, look at me. My hands, my side.

Thomas, who do you dare to believe? Because Jesus loves to reassure the doubters.

He's not stern, demanding or unsympathetic. Whatever thoughts you have about Jesus today, he has prepared himself to meet you where you're at. If you're a doubter, he comes to reassure you. But equally, you might be in a different place. If you're suffering, he comes to comfort you. If you're weak, he comes to strengthen. If you've got low self-esteem, he comes to acknowledge and accept you.

[10 : 48] He's not stern. He meets you where you're at with what you need. He actually came to meet you in the doubts and the complexities and the struggles of life.

Can I suggest something to you? Why not challenge Jesus to come and do that? Why not challenge him?

Ask him. Now, did you notice Thomas actually never asked Jesus to reassure him? But he did it anyway. How much more will Jesus come and reassure you in your doubts if you ask him yourself? Ask him to come and show himself to you where you're at. You might say something like this. Very simple. If you're real Jesus, show me. Show me. Show me. Will you dare to believe that?

[11 : 56] Secondly, Jesus' resurrection proves who he is. Now, I know I'm a little bit late to the party here, but I've been recently working through the series Breaking Bad.

And if you've seen it or maybe you've not heard of it, it's about this guy called Walter White. And the premise for the series is that at the beginning of the first episode or the second, he finds out, this guy called Walter White, he finds out that he's got stage 3 lung cancer and that it's spread to his lymph nodes.

And because of the complexities of the way the American health system and health insurance works, he doesn't have any way to pay for the treatment or to provide for his family after he's passed away.

But he wants to. And so the only way that he can think through a series of different circumstances happening in his life, the only way that he can think he's doing it is by going and making and selling illegal drugs and earning tons of money to leave to his family and to pay for his own treatment. But when you think about the premise to the series, the whole series begins because what's on Walter's mind is the prospect of death.

[13 : 16] That's what it's really all about, the prospect of death and how that's going to rip his life apart and rip apart the life of his family. That's right, it's for the first time it's saying him right in the face.

And what we see from that is how the fear of death, what it can do to a man and his family, how it can tear people apart. And it touches something inside you as you watch it because the reason it does that is because we understand and know something of the pain that Walter and his family experience.

Because we know that death, the prospect of it and the grief and the pain tear families apart. It's why there is a universal hatred of death.

It's why nobody wants to talk about it. It's why if you want to kill the atmosphere in a party, just start having conversations about death. No one, you'll quickly, people will start walking away from you because everyone hates it and wants to avoid it.

But here's, here's the thing. We've lived for it. We've lived with the perfect family for so long as, as a, as a, as part of nature that we, we've, we've kind of gotten our heads into thinking that it is the natural order of life.

[14 : 40] We've, we've come to believe that it's the natural way of how things go. But, but if that is true, if it's true that that is the natural order of things, why do we still struggle to accept it?

Why do we struggle to accept it? If that's the natural way, we should be expecting it and, and it shouldn't trouble us the way that it does. Now, lots of people might say that it's troubling because of the loss of the pain and the suffering that we, people go through.

And don't, don't get me wrong, that's certainly a part of it. But the real reason, deep down, the real reason that we really know that, we really know all, every single one of us that it isn't the way things should be.

We know there is something wrong with our world and we know that the death, the pain, the suffering, the corruption, the war, the disease, the famine, the natural disasters, those terminal diagnoses, that there is something wrong and we know it.

The reason we know it is because we were made for something. And the answer to what we were actually made for is right here in this passage.

[15:52] The answer comes in Thomas' response to seeing the resurrected Jesus before him. We saw Jesus says, look Thomas, it's me, it really is me.

And Thomas says, verse 28, my Lord and my God. My Lord and my God. It's really important what that means because it means that Thomas, that the Jesus who died is resurrected and stands before him.

It means that Jesus is risen from the dead. and it means that death itself can be only. That's what it means. It means that, it actually means that the deep, the deep longing that we have, have, that we're, we're actually right about our world.

We're all right. There is something wrong with it. You were right because Jesus puts death in its place. He beats it with his own death by rising above it. Death, do your best against Jesus.

When Thomas meets the risen, resurrected Jesus, when he sees that the thing that he fears, that we all fear the most, death itself, that tears people apart, has been defeated by this man who stands before him, he sees Jesus for who he really is, Lord and God.

[17:13] My Lord and my God. Two things to notice. Firstly, did you notice that Thomas just has to see him? There's, do you remember how he said to his friends, like, I have to touch it?

But there's no indication as we're reading it that he actually does touch. That sight is enough. He sees it and acknowledges Jesus. It's the sight isn't enough.

And we know that's why the case. Because dead people normally don't walk out the grave. Here is Jesus stood with Thomas, with the holes in his hands and his feet.

Thomas is saying, this is the living God because only the living God can do this. Second thing I want us to see is the relationship Thomas has with Jesus.

It's almost, it kind of takes on a new level. You see, he says, my Lord and my God. See how personal, how intimate this moment is between them?

[18:18] Not your Lord or our God, but mine. My Lord and my God. In this one phrase, he acknowledges the identity of Jesus that he's Lord and God, but also his relationship to him that is personal.

Very personal. Be able to say to someone that they, almost with might, it's kind of saying that they belong to you in one sense. You have to have a strong connection and relationship.

It's quite a bold thing to say, isn't it? That you belong to me. You're my Lord and you're my God.

What we really, what we witness here, what we witness is that meeting the resurrected Jesus changes Thomas from a doubting sin to a man of trust and faith.

And the turning point is the meeting. Now we all, we've all had different levels of exposure to Christianity. Some of us will know a lot more.

Some of us maybe not so much. Some of us may have grown up hearing about it. For others, this could be, maybe this is the first time or maybe the time that you, a time, a long time since you've looked into it.

[19:33] Spiritually speaking, we're all in different places. But putting that to one side for a moment. Whatever your past, whether you've been a goody two shoes or a rogue, whether you've come here with lots of doubts and cynicism or whether you're open-minded, whether you think you've heard it all before or whether this is the first time you're here, whatever your background, the living, resurrected Lord Jesus wants to have the same relationship, the same friendship that he has with Thomas, with you, with each one of us.

He wants to reassure your doubts. He wants you to know it doesn't matter if you know very little and he doesn't care about your past. Jesus Christ, who is Lord and God, wants to have a relationship with you and offers you it.

In the same way he defeated death, he promised for all those who have a relationship with him to defeat death for them. There is something wrong.

Death is not natural. Jesus Christ promises you right. This is the good news of the gospel. It's off to all.

Thirdly, Jesus promises eternal happiness. The final thing I want to say, probably slightly more briefly, is to look at this final thing that Jesus says.

[20 : 58] He responds, Thomas acknowledges who he is by saying something that on first glance it comes across a little bit like a put down. But the reason is actually what he says here, it is for Thomas but it isn't actually, it's more for those who weren't privy, who aren't privy to the same experience Thomas had, which is most Christians.

Because you might be thinking, and I'm sure you are, well that's great for Thomas, brilliant, but that doesn't help me, does it? Because of course Thomas could believe he was, Jesus was right there in front of him.

That's what I want. Jesus speaks into that issue. Verse 29. And Jesus told him, because you have seen me, you have believed, and here it is, blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.

And I take that to mean that for those who trust in Jesus, yet have not seen him in the flesh, are in some way, in some way, more blessed than Thomas is.

And so, there's two things to consider. The first thing to consider is what does it mean when Jesus says the word blessed? Now, very recently in our own day and age, the word blessed, for some reason, it has become a popular hashtag on media, on social media.

[22 : 24] People announce something good in life and it's quite normal to say hashtag blessed. However, in the first century, the joys of Twitter were not around.

And the word for blessed also means something slightly different. The word for blessed, it also could be translated as happy, the word blessed.

So it could read, happier those who have not seen and yet have believed. And I'm just going to tell you a quick personal story. When I was 18, I went to university in Newcastle and my mum, on the day that, I think it was September, I'm sure my age, it was 2003.

So I was 18, but drove up to Newcastle. My mum and dad drove me up, got me into my new digs, helped unload and get me settled. And then as I was leaving, my dad passed me an envelope and said, open it once I've gone.

So we'd said our goodbyes and they set off and on off I went to get sort of settled in my new accommodation. I'm not going to relay everything that was in that letter. It was very personal.

[23 : 33] But the last line he wrote said this, try and stay happy all your life. It's good advice, isn't it? Try and stay happy all your life.

And which one of us isn't trying to do that in our own life? Contentment and happiness is what we all want for. It showed, and still shows, what my dad really wants for me is to be happy and content. Jesus says, blessed, happy, are those who've not seen and yet believed. Now there is a difference between what Jesus says and my dad's advice.

Because, although it is great advice to try and stay happy, it suggests that I've got to do something to make it happen. But what Jesus says is that if you haven't seen him in the flesh and yet you believe in him, you will be happy.

You will be blessed. Jesus suggests that true happiness is not an emotive high or a plane that you're trying to reach. No, he's saying it's much more than that.

[24 : 43] Jesus is saying this is what you'll be. That if you believe, you are blessed and will be eternally happy. That's what Jesus means by blessed.

And don't get me wrong, that doesn't mean that if you're a follower of Jesus that life is just cupcakes and fairy tales. We have difficulties in our life.

Don't get me wrong. But he's saying that there is an eternal happiness, a greater happiness for those who trust in him that he's promised that is promised by those who put their trust in what the Bible says about him.

Some people say that putting their trust in something that they can't see in a book of words, they might call it religious faith or blind faith because we can't see Jesus in the flesh.

And perhaps they might suggest that this faith, it sounds kind of mystical or paranormal about Christians just believing without seeing anything. But faith is not a mystical thing.

[25 : 47] Faith is not a mystical thing. And the reason it's not a mystical thing is because we're trusting in what we're reading here. We're trusting in historical fact and eyewitness testimony.

That is what we're trusting in. And I just want you to explain briefly what that means for you. Everything that you read in the Gospels is eyewitness testimony. That is what we're putting our trust in.

Later on, in another part of the Bible, we read of 500 people saw Jesus alive after his death. They were eyewitnesses. This is actually where the Bible has its credibility.

Now just as an illustration, I want you to imagine this happening today. Imagine that as we're here in church, just at the end of the road. This is a little bit far-fetched, but just go with me on it.

This is purely for illustration. It was the old firm yesterday. And I just want you to imagine that for some bizarre reason, at the end of the road, both a set of Rangers, hardcore fans, and a set of Celtic fans have decided that Easter Sunday morning is the place where they're going to meet for a big scrap.

[27 : 03] Okay? And right now, as we're meeting, at the end of the road, they're going at it. And from Winchborough, 500 people, 500 people come out of there.

They hear all this din going on. They come out of their house and they watch the whole thing. As we're still here having this service, the police come and it's all quietened down by the time we're finished at about just before midday.

500 people witness it. And all 500 of them run to the bowling club. And one by one, I get each one of them up to the front to recount what they saw.

And all the stories, near enough, because they saw it from different perspectives, but near enough, we get a pretty good idea that it actually happened. 500 people saw a big Rangers and Celtics scrap at the end of the road.

which one of us would say, nah, didn't happen? Didn't happen. You wouldn't say that to 500 people.

[28 : 13] Bearing in mind, looking at us today, what is there of us? Maybe 30, including kids, maybe 35, 40 of us. You times that.

That means more than 10 times the amount of people that are in this room saw Jesus alive and are eyewitnesses to it. We would be fools to say, to tell, oh, that amount of people that it didn't happen. In court, if you have two people that agree on the same event that are eyewitnesses, somebody can be sent to prison. faith is not a mystical thing.

It is believing in the eyewitness evidence that we have. 500 people saw Jesus alive after his death. 500 people and Thomas is one of them. This dead man who was Jesus Christ is risen and he's still alive today.

You can trust the Bible. It's through their testimonies that we come to know him. He's alive and he offers you an eternal and forever blessed happiness. A state of being.

[29 : 21] A relationship with your Lord and your God so that you too can say my Lord and my God by believing in who he is. Today, as we've read the pages of the Bible, as we've read and thought this through, we have actually met with the Jesus of history.

We've actually met with him this morning. Will you be like Thomas and allow Jesus to reassure you in your doubts wherever you're at?

Now, you might not be quite at that stage and might still have lots of questions. Well, could I encourage you to, if you've still got those questions, to keep exploring or investigating the truth of who Jesus is.

There are a few ways that you could go about that. If you don't have a Bible, you can take one of these home with you today. And if you, Matt, there's a great gospel, Mark's gospel.

You could read that from the beginning to the end. It would take you about 15 minutes if you're a quick read, about 20 minutes if you're a slow reader. And I suggest by reading that through, what's 20 minutes of your life?

[30 : 34] Alongside that, what we're going to do is from next week, next Sunday, we're starting a whole series looking at Mark's gospel and thinking about it together.

It'd be great to see you back and thinking that through. And then, at the end of May, which is something that I'll keep people updated with, we'll be having a short evening every week thinking about the claims of Jesus.

Looking at a course called Christianity Explored. Informal, meeting homes, we'll eat together and explore the big things of who does Jesus say that he is. And if you come along to that, no question is off limits.

It'd be great to see people there. But it'd be great at this time as we think about who Jesus is, as we celebrate his life, his death and his resurrection, that Jesus Christ comes to reassure you wherever you're at.

And that's not just for people who are still thinking that through, but even Christians, we all have moments in our life when perhaps we doubt or wonder. Jesus comes to reassure you this morning in your doubts that he's alive, that he loves you, that he's risen from the dead and that he's come to give you life.

[31 : 49] And he won that for you by rising. Thank you. Almighty God, we thank you that Jesus Christ is alive.

We thank you that he is risen from the dead, that he has defeated death and sin and evil. And we thank you for the way that you relate to people, that you're not heavy-handed or stern or unsympathetic, but you're kind and compassionate and gracious and that you meet each of us where we're at.

And I pray for every person here today that you would meet each of us where we're at. And I pray that you'd help us be open and honest with you and be able to ask you, to challenge you to come and meet us where we're at, Lord Jesus.

I pray that you'd give us confidence in the Bible that it is true and that you are alive and that you reign and you rule and that you will for the eternity, the rest of history.

would you bless us with a faith that results from even though we haven't seen you in the flesh, would you give us the faith even though we've not seen you in the Lord Jesus?

[33 : 10] That we would be more blessed because we've believed in that way and that we have to see you. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.